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A HISTORY

OF THE

A. M. E. ZION CHURCH,

LANSINGBURGH, N. Y.

FROM 1841 TO 1868.



“And there was war in Heaven. Michael and his Angels fought against the Dragon, and the Dragon fought, and his Angels, and prevailed not.”

Rev., xii : 7.



1868.

PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR.

For copy of the N. J. - Charles,

FRIDAY

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JOHN ZON E. M. A.

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A HISTORY
OF THE
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FROM 1841 TO 1868.

Frisby Way and others with him had held meetings in their houses from time to time, for some years previous to 1841. In the meantime, a society called the Society of Methodists had taken and leased a lot in Whipple Avenue, (then called Pitt street,) above North street, and built a house of worship. The lot was 50 feet front and rear by 120 feet deep. In the course of time they could not pay for it, and a society of Wesleyan Methodists from Troy took the lease and house out of their hands. The Wesleyans becoming involved, and finding they could not pay for it, finally transferred the property and lease to Mr. Brockway; which lease was to the church forever, by paying \$11 a year.

Frisby Way went to Mr. Brockway and rented the church. At last they concluded to buy the church for \$300, and James Hall was made agent of the church, but was not a member or trustee, as they thought. They paid Hall his percentage for collecting for them. The Church paid in instalments. At last James Hall, John Dorsey and Jacob Brown paid the remaining money on the church, telling Mr. Brockway they were Trustees of the Colored Methodist Zion Church. These men were not members or trustees, for they were not incorporated. The law says they are not incorporated until entered on the County docket. On the word of these men to Brockway that the colored society's name was what they said, he transferred the lease,

with the church,—for the membership, as he thought. Before the church was paid for these men who thought they were trustees let James Hall and Daniel A. Oliver put a house on part of the church lot, by paying \$6 a year, the church to pay \$5 a year. Against this, Frisby Way and other members, who knew the property was leased to the Church, and \$300 paid for it, remonstrated, as they thought they could pay \$11 a year. Frisby Way saw how things was, and the minister-in-charge and members saw how these men who were not members were taking the power out of the Church's hands, and four months after these men received the property from Mr. Brockway, they released and deeded and sold, for one dollar forever, to James Hall, all the ground round the church, only where I have since rebuilt. These are the men that did this, and took away all the ground round the church, and were not trustees; and if they had have been they could not have released or sold unless the members all gave their consent, and procured a permit from a Judge of the Supreme Court. Jacob Brown, John Dorsey, Daniel A. Oliver, and H. J. McRogers, were the men that sold this property for \$1, and Mr. Oliver told me that James Hall never paid that \$1. This was done Sept. 6, 1844.

A contention went on about the name of the church. The outside party wanted it called the "Colored Methodist Zion Church." The members, and Frisby Way, and the minister-in-charge wanted it named the "African M. E. Church." These men, knowing the ground around the church had been leased and sold away in the name of the Colored Methodist Zion Church, which was not incorporated, tried to get that name.—The minister-in-charge, and Frisby Way, and the members, seeing how things were going on, gave out notice in the church of a trustee election, 15 days' notice, according to law. When the day of election came, the church doors were closed against the minister and members, and Frisby Way, who was one of the trustees that had been formed in 1843, but were not incorporated. Nevertheless the election went on in Frisby Way's house, under the direction of the minister-in-charge, and the three trustees

were elected in 1846. Frisby Way was the first man who rented the church from Brockway for the membership, and paid James Hall his percentage for collecting for them. When they came back to the church, Frisby Way and Philip Owens went and got the Society incorporated, May 19, 1846, one month before James Hall got the Colored Methodist Zion incorporated. Hall was not a member of the church, you will take notice, but knowing that if that name was not incorporated he could not hold the ground around the church, which had been deeded to him, he and Jacob Brown set their hands and seals August 12th, 1842, and after taking the books and papers from the church, goes up June 24, 1846, and gets the Colored Methodist Zion Church incorporated. But, thank God, he was one month and five days behind time on the County docket.

About the year 1857, the church boarded minister Butler at James Hall's. Butler told me that as soon as he found James Hall wanted to turn the Church into a Presbyterian Church, he told it out, and had to leave his house. The church owed Hall for Butler's board for 32 weeks at \$2 per week. Hall sued the church, but was non-suited, by not bringing the suit against Frisby Way, as President of the Board of Trustees. Hall sued again, William Wallace swearing to the contract, and having Frisby Way's name on the summons, he got judgment in 1858. Frisby offered him the money, \$72.30. He refused to take it, on the plea that he was afraid Frisby Way would close the church. I have taken an affidavit that the Justice did say he remembered the money, but did not remember the circumstance, and I have three or four affidavits to prove that the money was offered to him in 1858, when judgment was entered. I will give you the reason why he would not take it. He had not at that time mortgaged his house to buy the soil, as it was leased to the church forever, and he was afraid to rely on the illegal deed these outsiders gave him, and he had not been on the property, twenty years, so if his deed would fail he could fall back on the name "squatter," for he never bought the soil until 1866. Mr. Judson told me he said he would have the property in his own

hands, he knowing that he could not re-enter unless he owned the soil, and him being on the ground, if he owned the ground, according to the lease he could get all the property, church and all, without paying one cent, and only \$23.30 against the church before he bought the soil, for he undertook to keep things out of sight. July 28, 1863, Minister Silas Oliver, agent for the church, paid him \$30; May 21, 1864, Sylvester Mount paid him \$19 on the judgment, leaving only \$23.30 against the church. He was not entitled to the interest of this money, for he refused the money when he was offered it by the right party. If any person thinks James Hall has kept the church and paid the ground rent, the contrary can be proved by going to Mr. Judson's book. Hall, when these men let him put his house on the church lot, was to pay \$6 per year of the ground rent, and I, Wright, was going to pay him back the ground rent he had paid, but the law says not, that as long as he has been on that lot he should pay his rent, and he could then be ejected by those who held the lease. His book will show that James Hall has paid all the rent for nine years at \$11 per year,—\$54 for himself, and \$45 for the church. Frisby Way and David Van Vranken, both trustees and members of the church, paid the ground rent for both Hall and the church for seven years, \$35 for the church and \$42 for Hall, thus leaving the church \$3 in debt to him. I told him that he said to me he would give the church that \$3. This is what I told him after I had went down to Mr. Judson's office, and Mr. Walter Buckley gave me these figures from the book. So you see the church paid him \$42 of his rent. This paid up for what he paid for the church—\$45 for nine years—by him giving the church \$3. James Hall paid all the rent from 1845 to 1853; Frisby Way and David Van Vranken paid from 1853 to 1860, and the rent ran on until 1866, when James Hall mortgaged his house to buy the soil, and paid up the ground rent that was back. So you see instead of Mr. Judson receiving the rent that the lease calls for, it leaves James Hall to receive such rent. That is the only privilege the lease gives, and if the rent is not paid the owner can re-enter, and if there is not furniture

enough in the church to pay it, the whole property comes back to the owner. You can judge whether James Hall had this in view or not when he bought the soil.

I took the charge March 21, 1867, and became a member there, transferring my membership from the Seventh Street Church, Troy, having seen visions and God telling me that I had to do the work that was to be done in Lansingburgh. I refused, but He made me go, revealing my duty by an accident which happened to me while at work in Snow, Kempton & Co's store. Being caught by accident, I had to sustain the weight of 750 pounds, which strained the sinews of my arms and caused me to lose my strength. I tried three doctors, but they did me no good. The strength of my arms was gone. Having heard so much of Lansingburgh, I came and gathered up the lost sheep of the house of Israel, called the old members together and took new ones in. David Van Vranken was the only trustee left whose time had not expired, he having been elected in 1860 to serve seven years. All the other trustees resigned in 1864, in minister Dean's time. This can be proved by the oath of Sylvester Mount, Emory Tilman and many others. I went to James Hall, and told him I had come to pay all the debts of the church, and rebuild it, or build a new one. I asked him the amount of his debt. Some of the young men of the Sabbath School told me that James Hall said they could have the church until April, and then he was going to take it himself, because it owed him \$100 or \$200. He showed me the deed these men had given them. I told him not to go to any of the members. I saw from his talk there was a jar. I gave out my Jubilee to come off on the 21st of April, 1867. Hall came to my house, and told me I had better stop my Jubilee. He said the church owed him about \$70, and he would sell me a piece of ground for \$200 and give me a clear deed. When I came to pry into the matter, he told me that after he gave up the agency for the Methodist Church, he and six men formed themselves into a Presbyterian board and elected trustees, without incorporation, and went to the public, and got the money and bought that,

piece of ground where Benjamin Mason lives, corner of Hoosick streets and Whipple Avenue. I asked him how he could give me a clear deed, when it was bought for church property, and he said he was agent, and it was deeded over to him and Walter Buckley. I have went since to the County docket and have found two church properties in Lansingburgh deeded over to these two men, James Hall and Walter Buckley. I wish every one to take notice that both these church properties have got dwellings on them. This is the way it was with the ground on which the A. M. E. Church stands, James Hall getting these men, four months after the property was transferred over for the church, to deed it to him, before they were incorporated. Here is another church property corner of Hoosick street and Whipple Avenue, before incorporation, deeded over to James Hall and Walter Buckley. Both of these properties have had agents traveling to the public, begging money to build a Methodist church and a Presbyterian church, and neither one of them has got the whole of their property,—the Methodist church having only 20 by 36½ feet clear, until the Supreme Court decide on the illegal deed.

I told James Hall that the laws of this State did not allow men to collect money under false pretences, and going to the public getting money and buying property, and deeding it over to one or two individuals; and he said if we bought the other lot where Mason lived, of him, and paid him \$200, he would give us the \$70 we owed him, and let us have the use of the old church one year until we could build. I mentioned it to several; William Wallace said, 'go on with the Jubilee,' and if that ground was going to that church, he was chairman of the Presbyterian Board, and asked who would get the \$200 that was paid. I told him that Hall said he could give me a clear deed. He denied it. I told him Hall said the Board was broken up; he told me to go on, and if that property was given to our church, the church should have it without pay, for the money was got from the public for a Presbyterian church, and he was Chairman of that Board. I gave notice that we wanted money.

to pay the debts. I went to work, and the trustees passed a resolution that I was to have 25 per cent. for collection; and if I had taken my per centage, I would have had about \$180. But I put it all in, for James Hall sued me several times; they tried to have the church sold. I have collected from the white and colored friends and paid \$780.89; and also \$55 on the organ, making in all \$835.89. I have given in all my last year's labor to save the church. Many persons in the village said they had paid so much towards the church, and still no church had been built or rebuilt. But when I showed them the condition, and how men had gone to the public, collecting money and buying ground to put dwelling houses on, I intended to show these acts to the public, if it had have been the whitest man in the world or the blackest man, for I was determined to make this thing plain, if I should lose my life on that account. God showed me the whole thing one year before I would come. No minister could stay a long time, because there were men kept in the Trustee board on J. Hall's side, against God and the church. Men I was told would go out of the class-meeting and out of the pulpit and go to the gambling table. But God so ordered it that in 1864 all but one resigned. The very one that God designed to not resign was David Van Vranken, and he held the incorporation until he nominated his successors. The Trustee line of this church has never been broken since the church was incorporated in 1846. James Hall has not been a member of that church, but belonged to a Presbyterian church in Troy, and had no right to the name of the Colored Methodist Zion, and only wanted it to confirm his illegal deed, as he received it in that name.

When Mr. Brockway, the man that built the church, saw how James Hall had got the church involved, and I showed him the two incorporations, one of them by the minister-in-charge and the members, and that one the oldest, and how the doors were closed against the members and minister-in-charge by persons not belonging to the church, he went before Justice Neary and

said he would take an oath that when these men paid the remainder of the three hundred dollars, they said they were trustees and bought it for the church, else he would never have transferred the lease nor the church. He gave me a new lease, and stated that Frisby Way first rented the church for the society.

The following are the old members of the church: Frisby Way has been a member 26 years, Diana Vincent about 20 years, David Van Vranken, 20; Sophia Van Buren, 20; Harriet Fields, about 20; James Callahan, about 16; John Mott, about 12, and Elizabeth Van Buren about 17 years.

I went to Jacob Lansing's carpenter shop, and showed him the copy of the lease from the County Docket. He saw his grandmother's name on it. I put him to work. He said Benjamin Mason came to him, and said for him not to touch that church, as he had a lien on it, and he would put an injunction on it. But they did not know that this was my fifteenth church, and that I had some experience in law matters, having pleaded cases in Delaware State, my home, although it was a slave State, and I the only colored man that was ever known to plead a case of inquisition in that State, against one of the so-called smartest lawyers in the State, and beat him. One of the lawyers of Troy that I employed to stand for the defence of this church, (Mr. Runkle, firm of Runkle & Flagg,) will tell you that he heard me plead a case at the bar against a man by the name of Hicks, and beat him; and it has only cost the church \$10 for lawyer's fees since I took the charge. I did the business of a lawyer, and I had clerks writing at night to bring things all right.

The building went up. The gentleman that wrote my subscription paper, and put his name down first, was Col. John S. Fake. On that paper I collected seven hundred dollars. It seemed that nearly all the colored people were against me for uncovering this dirt. Every one of them seemed to want to be a Presbyterian. I had some of the richest men in Troy and Lansingburgh for my friends, and God sending angels to attend me, was guided aright.

Mrs. Sylvester Mount said to me; "Mr. Wright, do not get my husband shot or killed, for Mrs. Hall said if he put his foot on that ground if Hall would load the pistol she would shoot him." It seemed that she blamed Mount for getting Hall in this, because Mount was to convert the church into a dwelling for him. Mr. Mount told me that Hall said it belonged to him; that the trustees had sold the ground to him, and he had so much against the church that it belonged to him too. If any person looks at it right, they will not blame Mount, as he has only been here about nine years, and these acts have been done ever since 1844; and other attempt to get money for a pretended Presbyterian Church on the corner of Whipple Avenue and Hoosic Street, has been going on about eight years. This act of Hall's, trying to get all the property in his hands, was premeditated twenty-two years ago. Mrs. Hall made her visits around to the wives of our members and trustees, and endeavored to set them against me, and in many instances succeeded. According to law, having taken the chairman seat in the Trustee Board, I would go where I pleased on the ground, for I know it rightly belonged to the church. Mr. Mount told me the women was so against me that I had better go to the saloon to get my meals. I told him there were two places where the devil's agents could not go to hurt me, that was to Mr. Tillman's and to Mrs. Vincents. I want every one to know the truth. I have papers to prove me clear in any court in the United States. The reason of the divisions among the colored people in Lansingburgh is that James Hall's connections number about twenty-six in that place, and they always worked to make trouble in the Methodist Church. There has been twenty-four Ministers stationed there, I being the twenty-fifth, and none of them could succeed there.

I told the people they had seen what men could do, and now I would show them what God could do, and all that has been done was told of before it was begun. I have plenty of witnesses in Troy and Lansingburgh to prove that is so, and now I

will see, by the help of God, that the ground around the church is as clear as the ground where the church stands and see that the church pays the ground rent for the whole lot, 50 by 120 feet, which was leased to the church, and to the possession of which she is entitled forever, by paying \$11 per year.

Jerome Mott told the foreman of one of my best men, Mr. Powers, where I expected to get my most money, and the foreman told Mr. Powers, that the money I was collecting, I was going to put in Court to keep Hall out of a just debt; when I can prove that he, (Hall) could have got the money when the judgement was given in 1858, but he let it run near nine years, and then wanted interest. After he had received \$49, leaving \$23 30 due him, he took his oath that the church owed him \$63 98. Mr. Lyon said he took his oath before him that he notified the President of the Trustee Board, Mr. Tilman. Mr. Tilman took his oath that he resigned inside of three years, in 1864, the time that Mount and Mason, and all the other trustees but one resigned. Mrs. Mount said she was there, and Mrs. Gifford was there, and I have got three or four persons oaths to that effect. When he found that he was non-suited, he showed his act of incorporation, and the lawyer asked him where was his church, and he belonging to the Presbyterian church of Troy.

Hall got out an execution the ninth of May, 1867, which was not worth two cents, as the judgement was over five years old, and could not be revived only by the permit of the Court, and he knew that if he summoned the party in the church, he had to go through a trial, so he took an oath that Mr. Tilman was President of the Board of Trustees, and went to the Court and got a permit from the Judge to get the execution, not telling the Judge that he had one execution out already. I went and told the Judge, and the Clerk said he would not let another out, because there was one out and not returned, and the Sheriff could not return it, for there was property. It was not in the Sheriff's

hands until I sent the Sheriff for it, and he sent his Deputy-Sheriff. Hall had it near four months.

Jerome Mott and others said the church would be taken away when I got it done. They did not know that I was born under the Venus Star, with five fingers on each hand, and that God would show me even the secrets of their hearts. If I was not inspired, I would never preach. 2d Timothy, 3 :16; Job, 32: 8.

Let me say to the ministers, if you do not get but a cup of cold water and a piece of bread, do not cover up the misdeeds of any man or woman. This has been the trouble. When a minister would strike at the root of the evil, they would not keep him. God showed me that the work could not be done, except by taking my membership to Lansingburgh, and leaving my family in Troy, where my wife knew ladies who gave her work, and she has sustained me, the church only paying me enough for four months rent, my travelling expenses, and a few dollars for something to eat.

By the help of the Lord, I stopped all proceedings in the hands of the Judge, Sheriff and County Clerk, have got the church rebuilt, and paid for, and thank God, if I live, I am ready in the Spring for another campaign to eject James Hall off the church property. If he had but one church property deeded to him it would not look so bad, but he has two. Persons say I have not been to the College to study for the ministry, and this is the reason they do not want me. I wish to say that I never went to school one day in my life. I went to bed not knowing how to read in the Bible, and the next morning I could read any chapter in the Book. I have been a scholar in Christ's school, learning how to uncover dirt, for nearly twenty-two years, and could have been in the itinerancy over fifteen years ago, but I cannot cover up dirt. This is the first charge I ever would take, out of fifteen churches I have built or rebuilt, and I have preached over twenty years. Many things traveling ministers often cover up or

